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### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)**

**(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)**

## *Local tuna industry plays by int'l rules*

GENERAL SANTOS CITY — With the Senate's recent ratification of the Multilateral High Level Convention (MHLIC) on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, the Southern Mindanao tuna industry is gearing up to play by international rules to ensure its continued competitiveness in the coming years.

The MHLIC is an agreement among more than twenty Pacific and European countries to efficiently manage and conserve the Pacific Ocean's tuna resources.

The ratification of the Convention guarantees the Philippines full membership status in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the regional body tasked to manage tuna resources in the Pacific Ocean west of 150°W. The Commission will determine total allowable catch, allocate quotas to member countries, and regulate fishing methods.

More importantly, the Southern Mindanao tuna industry — 80 percent of which is based in General Santos City — stands to benefit from catch quota allocations from this \$3 billion resource.

The Philippine tuna industry lands around 1,000 metric tons (MT) of tuna daily, which generates annual revenues reaching \$300 million. General Santos is the country's leading supplier of canned tuna, high value sashimi tuna and tuna steaks to the Japanese, European and American markets.

Six of the country's eight canneries are operating in the city, while over twenty frozen sashimi export-based fish processing plants have made the city their home, providing employment to around 65,000 SOCKSARGEN residents.

“The manner in which the international tuna



industry — including the Philippines — deals with resource sustainability will determine the state of the Pacific stocks in the years to come,” points out Dr. Stanley Swerdlof, senior fisheries consultant for the USAID-funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program.

Of the three tropical tuna species, bigeye and yellowfin are fished at or above maximum sustainable yield. Only skipjack tuna fisheries remain below its maximum sustainable yield.

Being a signatory to the MHLIC Convention, Dr. Swerdlof says the Philippines can actively take part in the formulation and implementation of measures to manage the Pacific's tuna resources.

The Philippines is a party to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Fish Stock Agreement, which require the country to support global initiatives aimed at efficiently manage the region's highly-migratory fish stocks.

Among the Philippines' major commitments to the MHLIC are: 1) prevent or eliminate overfishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPFC), the world's primary tuna fishing grounds; 2) to collect and provide accurate data on its total fish catches; and 3) assess the impact of its fishing activities on relevant fish stocks.

The initiatives undertaken by the private sector-led SOCKSARGEN Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc. (SFFAI), in partnership with the GEM Program, helped paved the way for the successful ratification of the MHLIC.

The Federation drafted position papers that convinced top officials from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Fisheries Industry Development Authority (FIDA) to attend international MHLIC sessions and actively participate during the deliberations. The Philippine officials were backed up by a private sector contingent composed of representatives from the Southern Mindanao fishing industry.

This development resulted in the Philippines joining 21 other countries as signatories to the Convention establishing the WCPFC.

Ensuring the sustainability of the Pacific Ocean's fish stocks and enhancing the competitiveness of country's tuna industry in the global market will be among the key issues to be tackled during the forthcoming 7th National Tuna Congress slated from September 2-3, in General Santos City. (GEM)

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